Quaker Religious Thought

The Early Quaker Vision of the Church

Lewis Benson

COMMENTS

By Henry J. Cadbury, T. Canby Jones, and D. Elton Trueblood

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Editorial

The purpose for which this periodical was originally formed continues to be carried out in this, the third issue of the *Journal of Quaker Thought*. That purpose, as stated by the Quaker Theological Discussion Group which sponsors this publication, is "to explore more fully the meaning and implications of our Quaker faith and religious experience." These issues have all been concerned with studying early Quakerism in order to discover afresh what its basic principles were and to find what light it may have for our own day. Howard Brinton wrote the main article for the first issue, on Quakerism and the Holy Spirit. Maurice Creasey developed the early Quaker understanding of Jesus Christ in the second issue. This issue deals with the Friends' understanding of the church. It is planned to examine the early Quaker understanding of the nature of man in the near future.

Religion today is marked by strong emphasis upon the individual and his own religious experience. Living religion, it is felt, must find its center in what the individual can discover of God and can make meaningful for his own personal life. Over against this stands the historic Christian interest in the "Church," the fellowship of Christians who are united in their faith and obedience as disciples of Christ. Modern Friends are generally not clear as to either the nature of the issue or where they themselves stand in regard to it. It is to this question that Lewis Benson addresses himself, as he examines the writings of George Fox in their bearing upon this matter. He is eminently qualified by long study for this task. The conclusions he reaches are clear and stand as challenges to all simple, modern views.

The three critics present views quite different from those of Lewis Benson, as they examine his conclusions. In his final summation, Lewis Benson has an opportunity of evaluating their comments on the basis of his own understandings. Readers will be stimulated by these presentations to examine their own views and, hopefully, to study afresh this topic, with its wide implications for the future of Quakerism.

Comments and criticisms upon this and earlier issues will be welcomed by the editor. They can be addressed to him in Canton, N. Y.

J. C. K.

The Early Quaker Vision of the Church

A STUDY IN CHRISTIAN RENEWAL

LEWIS BENSON

During the three centuries that have elapsed since the beginnings of Quakerism there have been many changes in understanding of original Quaker thought. Not the least of these changes is that which has to do with the understanding early Friends had of the church, and of themselves as the church of Christ. I am happy to take this opportunity to try to reconstruct some of the essential features of the early Quaker vision of the church and to describe the view Friends held of how the church renews its life.

WAS EARLY QUAKERISM A SECT?

We must begin by asking whether George Fox intentionally founded either a new sect or a new denomination. Since the days of Fox the terms "sect" and "denomination" have taken on new meanings and, in any case, they are terms whose meanings vary with the standpoint of the user. As a simple working definition for the purpose of this study we will say that a sect is the formation resulting from a splintering off from a parent body by a faction or party in order to emphasize some doctrine or practice not sufficiently emphasized by the original group. Fox taught that the sectarian spirit does not come from God but from the devil. "God and Christ make no sects," he says.

Today the plurality of denominations is generally accepted as inevitable and unavoidable but in Fox's day this acceptance was by no means universal. He himself did not accept the multiplicity of denominations as consistent with his vision of the church. The presence of "so many names" and "so many churches (so-called)" was for him a sign of apostasy. It is true that he was ready to defend the right of denominations to exist free of

molestation by the secular authorities but he did not conceive of the Christian church as a federation of constituent denominations. Holding such convictions as these, Fox could not have been guilty of intentional apostasy by himself starting a new denomination. In so far as the Quaker community has now become a new denomination it has become something very different from what he intended.

Some have claimed that Fox's original objective did not include the establishment of any kind of religious community. I will not attempt to deal with this claim here, aside from pointing out that from the beginning of his public ministry Fox proclaimed a message which he believed must result in a visibly gathered fellowship. He says, for instance, that "when the Lord God and his Son Jesus Christ sent me forth into the world . . . I was to bring people off from their churches, which men had made and gathered, to the church in God."

We seem then to face a dilemma: Fox did not intend to add another denomination to those already existing, and yet he was called to "bring people . . . to the church." To find him gathering a new people while claiming he is not founding a new denomination is baffling to our twentieth-century minds, so we look for a simple explanation.

One such explanation interprets Fox and the early Friends as conforming to the general pattern of sect-makers. In their first extravagant burst of enthusiasm these mistakenly believe that they have discovered the true church. Later, when the first flush of zeal has subsided, more sober evaluation usually shows such a movement to have been narrowly preoccupied with particular aspects of truth at the expense of other equally important aspects. This simple explanation has found ready acceptance in our period. Seen from this standpoint, early Friends provide an object lesson in what is frequently now regarded as a major sin, namely, denominational absolutism. To give such an explanation as this requires no detailed knowledge of early Quakerism. All that is required is the knowledge that early Friends made the claim that the true church was re-emerging through their movement and that subsequently they took on the character of a sect or denomination. With this minimum stock of "facts" the formula referred to above can be applied and a sup-

posed solution found to the dilemma. But this too-simple "solution" does not fit the facts of early Quakerism and so we must turn again to the sources in our attempt to gain a truer understanding of the early Quaker vision of the church.

BASIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

Fox's vision of the church is based on his view of the relationship between man and God. His Christian anthropology is expressed in terms of the story of Adam and Eve and this revolves around the concept of the *image of God.* The *image of God* is not to be understood as something that man possesses as part of the humanity with which he is endowed at creation but it expresses, rather, a state of relationship between God and man. Edmund Perry says that the image of God "is not a *something* in the structure of man. It is the dialogic relationship in which man stands to God. God speaks to man and thereby enables man to reply: man is a creature to whom God speaks demanding a reply."[2] Emil Brunner says, "God has a different relation to man than he has with other creatures. . . . He reveals his will to him and expects obedience and trust from him. It is not that man as he is in himself bears God's likeness, but rather, that man is designated for and called to a particular relation to God."[3] These two modern writers have set forth the essential elements of Fox's position. Man was created to live a life of dialogue with his creator. Through man's disobedience this relationship becomes lost and man ceases to live the life for which he was created. Fox says that the death that Adam fell into by disobedience was a "spiritual death" and that when men disobey God they fall into this same kind of "death." The only true freedom that man has is answering God in obedience. When this is lost, says Penington, the will becomes "captivated."

It is only in this life of dialogue with his Creator that man learns what is right and comes to live a life of righteousness and holiness. Fox taught that this conversational relationship has been broken and that consequently the holy life and true freedom have been lost.

Early Friends found in the Bible the story of how God took the initiative to redeem man from this alienated condition. In the Bible the redemptive purpose of God is always set forth in

terms of gathering a holy people. God's people are to serve a two-fold purpose: they are to show forth the glory of God who is able to gather a righteous, holy people by the power of his word, and they are also to be the instruments of God's universal redemptive purpose. The key to fulfilling this two-fold purpose lies in hearing and obeying the speaking God. At Mt. Sinai the covenant-making God says, " . . . if you will obey my voice . . . you shall be my own possession among all peoples; . . . and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. . . ."

Whenever the covenant people forget that their peculiar relationship to God has its foundation in obedient and willing hearts and that God has called them to be a nation of priests to the uncovenanted nations then the prophets appear. From them God's people again hear the voice of the Lord: "For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. . . .' "

This call to return again and obey the voice of the speaking God has often met with resistance and opposition from those people whose very existence is rooted in the soil of prophetic religion, namely, the Jews and the Christians. Among the people pledged to obey God's voice there sometimes develops an especially stubborn obtuseness. They become enmeshed in the tradition of prophetic religion for its own sake and become deaf to the voice that is spoken today. The deafness of Israel to God's voice is not a matter of not hearing God's word but of failing to understand it with the heart, and so failing to respond in the obedience of faith. The God-given capacity for obedient response becomes flabby or rigid, which are the states called fat-hearted or hard-hearted in the Bible.

The call of the prophets is for a return to the vital conversational relationship. They bring the word of God that is spoken and heard today and which must be obeyed today. "Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." William Barclay says that hardness of heart describes the mental condition of a man who cannot see the lesson that events are designed to teach him.[4] Such a man has lost the dialogic relationship.

It was this preoccupation with and over-valuation of the *heritage* of prophetic religion, making it a substitute for the actual experience of hearing and obeying the voice of God, that caused the people of covenant and promise to fail to answer the living word that was spoken in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. New Testament writers attribute the failure of the Jews to receive Jesus to hardness of heart.

CHRIST ESTABLISHES A NEW ISRAEL

The apostles saw that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sent his Son into the world to establish a new Israel. Stephen, Peter and the author of Hebrews identify the resurrected Jesus with the prophecy of Moses that God would send a prophet like himself whom the people should hear in all things. In the new covenant God's people are related to the risen Christ as the old covenant people were related to the prophets. Here, instead of a scattered succession of prophets at irregular intervals, is a prophet always accessible in our midst. Instead of a written code of laws there is a divine lawgiver. Instead of a priestly, ceremonial, temple religion there is a heavenly priest who is able to present his people to his father clean and without blemish.

The risen Christ is the prophet who now teaches God's people *himself*. In him the conversational relationship between God and his people, which was imperfect in the old covenant, is now made perfect. As Christ is present in the midst of his people he exercises his offices as prophet, priest and king. Fox says, " . . . there is no true church but where Christ exercises his offices in and amongst them."[5]

When it is said in Ephesians that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" Fox understands this to mean that the conversational relationship which the prophets and apostles had with God is basic to the church's life. The apostles are not merely the witnesses of certain events but they are those who saw in these events the word of God for *today* and saw them as the fulfilment of the promises and prophecies. Others knew of the promises and prophecies and witnessed the same events but their perceptive faculties had become so rigid that they saw without seeing.

For Fox and early Friends the terms "church" and "people of God" are interchangeable. They speak of the church "before the apostles' days" and the "church in Moses' day." In both Old and New Testaments the church is the people called by God to holiness and to a mission to the nations. Fox did not understand the church to be a voluntary association of religionists. It is the people raised up by the power of God to answer God's call. It is the church as long as it answers God's call. When it loses the direct conversational relationship with God's heavenly prophet, priest and king, it is no longer the church. The true church, then, is the community whose life is patterned after the life of the prophets and apostles because, like them, it lives by the voice that is heard today.

Hearing God's voice "while it is today" does not mean emphasis on the subjective psychological factor of Christian experience at the expense of the historical and social factors. Hearing and obeying the voice of God leads men into a holy community and it leads to a prophetic understanding of the meaning of history. The word that is heard today is related to all that God has said and done before. It is only as we become obedient participants in holy history that we come to understand the meaning of salvation. As Fox found himself caught up in the messianic event and saw heavenly Jerusalem coming down to be established again in the earth, he was able to read the Scriptures aright because he had come into the relationship that the prophets and apostles were in who gave them forth. Fox rejects the claims of all who assert that their individual Christian experience is sufficient and that they have no need for holy history. It is such, he says, that "start up to be as Gods and never came through the prophets, nor Moses' house, nor Christ. . . ."[6]

Fox spoke so much in terms of "light" that his message about the light is often described as the central principle of the Quakers. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the light to which Fox was calling people is a light that *speaks* and which *must* be *heard* and *obeyed.* It is the loss of the conversational relationship with God which is "darkness." "Light" is the reestablishing of that relationship. "Hearken to the light," says Fox, " . . . whereby you may come to the life of the prophets and Moses. . . ."[7]

As Fox understood it, the church is not a secondary feature of Christianity. Jesus came to establish a "new Israel" and we have not made a full response to his coming until we have become gathered into this new Israel which is gathered not by building up the roster of a religious organization but by bringing people to establish a conversational relationship with the living Christ. Fox maintained that all who have received Christ and are members in him are heirs of his government and heirs of the order of the gospel, and that the Quakers were to claim their inheritance and take possession of this gospel order.

There is a sequence of events here. First, there is preaching and receiving Christ, then there is a taking possession of his government and order. But the church is not *just* an association of those who have had an individual experience of the living Christ. Christ came not only to redeem individuals but to redeem Israel. Coming into the conversational relationship with the living Christ leads to the *community* that is sustained by this same kind of relationship. The church is the people whom God has called to fulfill his purpose for history and society. It is not a man-made religious association. In its inner life it has the character of a spiritual organism and not that of a human institution. This part of the early Quaker vision of the church was misunderstood in both the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. In the seventeenth century the "voice which is heard today" came to the Quakers saying *"Now* is the time to take possession of your inheritance of the government and order of Christ." But many within the Quaker fold hardened their hearts against this call. Fox and Edmundson testify that the most stubborn opposition to their labors came not from the priests and magistrates but from the Quaker individualists.

In the twentieth century the sequence, already noted, of first receiving Christ and then taking possession of his order and government has been treated as an actual shift of emphasis and change of policy. This view sees the original Quaker movement as having no vision of the church visibly gathered and no intention of gathering a holy community. Later, it is claimed, this original position was found to be impractical and was "surrendered" in order to meet the demands of an expanding movement. Thus the first Quaker community has been described as the

"creation of unconscious insight." In so far as this view has gained ground it has led Friends to believe that the structure of the Quaker community is, at best, a practical device and no part of the original vision. It has kept us from seeing that the gospel order and government of Christ *is* a part of the gospel as early Friends understood it and that this order has a character which is distinct from that of sacerdotal, ceremonial, hierarchical, ecclesiastical structure. Because of this tendency to think of church order as secondary and subject to human improvisation we have come to accept a double standard of church polity in the Society of Friends today. Some Quakers like one kind of polity and others prefer another kind. We do not feel any compulsion to find the right way for all because we no longer believe there is a right way for all.

In the light of the view held by Fox of the nature of God, man, sin and salvation as outlined above, we can now look at his vision of the nature of the church. The central feature of this vision is his conviction that the *church* is a *community that hears and obeys the voice of God.* It is the people among whom the dialogic relationship (the image of God) has been restored by Christ. Fox says that the fallen church is "out of God's image" but that they that come to the church in God must be "renewed again up into God's image."[8]

APOSTASY

Fox did not understand apostasy in terms of a departure from a pattern of church life established once for all in the first century. He saw it, rather, as a departure from (1) "the prophets' life" of hearing and obeying, (2) righteousness and holiness, (3) the true freedom of God's people, (4) the cross and (5) the order and government of Christ. He was looking for a church that had not departed from these five aspects of the true church. It will repay us to examine each of these more closely.

The first element of apostasy is the key to them all. When Fox says that the church apostasized from the "true prophets' life" and the "apostles' life" he means that it has lost the life of dialogue, which is the life of hearing and obeying. He taught that to be "kept in the life" means to "hear God,"[9] and he exhorts all to return to Christ Jesus the great prophet and hearken

to the light, that they may hear God speak to them by his son and come to the life that the prophets and Moses were in.[10]

The second element of apostasy is the loss of righteousness and holiness. Righteousness and holiness, says Fox, are the badge and livery of the true church. In one of his early "openings" he had a vision of a people in white raiment ready to be gathered to the Lord. "White raiment" was understood by him in the biblical sense of the righteousness of Christ. "Come forth and shine, all ye children of light," he exhorts, "and go in white, the righteousness of Christ Jesus . . . for now is the church coming out of the wilderness and now is she . . . shining forth in white raiment . . ."[11] When the church becomes the religious department of an otherwise non-Christian society its white raiment becomes defiled and its badge and livery are lost.

The third element to be considered here is Fox's conception of the freedom of God's people under the new covenant. As Fox saw it, Christianity is not one of the cultural religions, and the Christian church cannot be integrated into human civilization as one component in a larger cultural complex. The true church can never be the servant of the *status quo*. The character of Christian community ought never to be determined by the social forces that impinge on it. It must be ready to find the pattern of corporate life which is given from above because our God "is a dynamic being, external to the processes of life, engaged in the active direction of history to his own ends."[12] The false church by accepting its sanctions from the secular power loses its God-given freedom.

The fourth aspect of apostasy is the loss of the power of the cross. In the free, God-directed church there often appears a spirit and practice that creates tension between the church and the world. In this contest the world possesses the chief instruments of social control. How then does the church overcome the world? It is by the power which the world cannot give or take away—the power of the cross. The true church lives by this power. Fox says that the apostasy began when the church "apostatized from the true cross, the power of God."[13]

And, fifthly, Fox says that in the apostasy "the gospel order was lost amongst them and the government of Christ."[14] Christ the head of the church confers gifts on all the members and this

creates an ordered disciplined community that is unique and incapable of being reduced to the terms known to religious sociology. There is an element of mystery here which becomes a stumbling block when we try to understand it apart from a master-disciple relationship to the living Christ. There is an order that belongs to the gospel, says Fox, and so "if you keep in the gospel order and government of Christ Jesus, you will keep out of the apostacy." [15] The key to this order is the conversational relationship with God through Christ. Fox says "When people are returned to Christ, their Shepherd, they know his voice, and follow him" and then they "come to be members of the church of Christ" and are "ordered by his heavenly, gentle, peaceable wisdom."

WHERE IS ZION NOW?

I wish to maintain that Fox's original quest, while partially preoccupied with his own inner conflicts, was a quest for the new Israel or new covenant community. The early "openings" that came to him were largely insights into the nature of membership, ministry, worship, in Christ's church. The questions that he was pondering were such as these: Where is Zion now? Where is the new Israel? Where is the new Jerusalem? Where are God's holy people who are ordered by Christ and sustained by the power of his cross? Where is the church which has not compromised with worldly authority, whose supreme authority is the risen Christ?

Fox should be distinguished from those radical reformers who arose in the century after Luther and Calvin and sought for a stricter reform on the basis of the authority of Scripture. "The church in God is not in imitation, gathered from the letter," says Fox.[10] Unlike the radical reformers he does not seek to restore some primitive *pattern* of church life that is believed to be discoverable in the New Testament. His appeal is to return to the life of dialogue, to hear and obey Christ's voice, to accept his cross and to be gathered into the community of which he is head and orderer. The Bible is not regarded by Fox as the church's principal authority. Again and again he says, "Christ is the authority of your Men's and Women's Meetings." His emphasis is on the conversational relationship.

Fox's claim, "The Quakers are not a sect but are . . . come to live in the life as the prophets and apostles did"[17] is not without the support of history. The Quakers did not, in fact, split off from some particular parent group in order to lay emphasis on some particular point not sufficiently stressed in the larger group. Penington says that the Quakers were "not persons that have shot up out of the old root into another appearance, as one sect hath done out of another."

According to Fox, when a community claims to be the church but does not live in the same life, power and spirit that the prophets and apostles lived in, it is in reality a sect. The amalgamation of such groups is of no real significance to the cause of unity because "if all men and women in the world could meet outwardly together and are not in the power and spirit the apostles were in, they are in a separation, and apostacy from the apostles' spirit."[18]

For Fox the term "Quakers" was a most unacceptable appellation. He speaks of Friends as the people of God "despitefully called Quakers," "misnamed Quakers," "scornfully called Quakers" and "nicknamed Quakers." This name had a sectarian sound that Fox heartily disliked. He says, "The Quakers are the seed of Abraham in the seed in which all nations are blessed and the faith of Abraham and never came from the Protestants nor Papists neither from their evil root nor stock but from the root of David and the stem of Jesse and from the light of Christ Jesus. As we believe in the light as Christ commands we are out of all their sects."[19]

Early Quakers were filled with the conviction that God is *now* bringing back the church that hears and obeys the voice of God's heavenly prophet Jesus Christ. This is the time chosen by the Lord of history to bring the disciple church back into history. Just as God chose a time to bring the Israelites out of Egypt "so there is a time set for God's people to come out of spiritual Egypt."[20] The Quakers believed that they were the heralds of a new era and Fox says that "they who neglect or refuse to hear the voice of Christ, now speaking from heaven, in this his gospel-day, harden their hearts."[21] The failure to see that God has taken the initiative *at this time* to restore the disciple church is comparable, in Fox's mind, to the failure of the Jews

of Jesus' day to receive Christ and the new covenant of light. Speaking plainly to the scoffers and refusers of his own day and such as were "out of the life of the prophets" Fox says, "Alas for you! all your profession . . . is vain, ye are but as the Jews were."[22] These were they that were gone "from the life" of dialogue and "could not hear, nor see the life, when the life spake unto them." Early Friends not only had a vision of the church but a compelling sense that God was calling *them* to labor to establish this church *now*. This accounts for the eschatalogical urgency in all they said and did.

A STOCK OBJECTION

The churches who have not shared with Friends the heritage of radical reformation have sometimes asserted that the early Quaker vision of the church is only realizable in a world in which there are solidly established sacramental, sacerdotal churches which accept the Bible as their authority. It is claimed that where such churches dominate the Christian scene groups like the early Quakers may enjoy a parasitical existence. This disciple church, we are told, is by its very nature only valid for one generation. It has no machinery for perpetuating itself. If it were the sole bearer of the gospel and gospel fellowship the historical continuity of Christianity would be in danger. The creedal, sacramental, sacerdotal churches are thus pictured as being the chief responsible bearers of the Christian cause through history. Groups like the Quakers come and go. They lead an ephemeral and derived existence.

Early Friends replied to statements such as these that the demand for perpetuity comes from man and not God. God demands righteousness, an obedient ear and the charismatic ordering of his people. There is no guarantee of perpetuity for the church in the new covenant apart from obedient following of the head of the church.

Robert Barclay set forth as the Quakers' principle that "no gathering, no church, nor assembly of people," are to be accounted the church of Christ unless they are spirit led. He says that the Quakers "admit none to be members except such as are led and guided by the spirit." The right to claim to be the true church "is not annexed to the persons, to the succession, to the

bare visible profession but singly and alone to the true, real and effectual work of sanctification and regeneration."[23] Fox says that "any worldly man will tell you, it signifies nothing to have only the writings of an estate, and not to possess it: and therefore to succeed the apostles aright, is to succeed them in the same power and Holy Ghost they were in. . . ."[24] "All that succeed the apostles and the true church, it must be in this hearing, sight, handling, witnessing and declaring of this possession, of this life, Christ that was in the apostles and the true church, else they are no succeeders to them. . . ."[25]

TRUE CHURCH AND FALSE CHURCH

Fox declares to the churches of his day: "Now there is not one of you all, that ever durst say, ye have heard God's voice immediately from heaven, or Christ's voice, or have the same spirit the prophets, and apostles, and Christ had . . . So then you are in another ordination than they were in . . ."[26] The church's authenticity does not consist in its relation to an historical stream of succession. Fox says that the "title Mother has been given to places and sects amongst degenerate Christians"[27] but that the church of the new covenant "cannot join to or own any mother church below her that is heavenly."[28]

The Quakers claimed heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city that comes down from heaven, for their mother and, says Fox, we "cannot own any other, neither outward Jerusalem, nor Rome, nor any sect of people for our mother, but Jerusalem, which is above."[29] "Jerusalem was the mother of all true Christians before the apostacy; and since the outward Christians have broken into many sects, they have got many mothers: but all they that are come out of the apostacy by the power and Spirit of Christ, Jerusalem that is above is their mother (and none below her)."[30]

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Fox does not consider that the church is a community whose validity is based on the regularity and continuity of its historical descent "like unto earthly kings' crowns." All that succeed the apostles and true church must do so by "walking in the light," which means by obeying the voice of God's prophet who is the risen Christ. The Jerusalem of time and place remains a crumbling symbol of God's intent to gather to himself a holy people in the Old Cove-

nant. But the New Covenant proclaims a new kind of holy people which is a continuation in the new order of what God was doing in the old order. This new community, the new Jerusalem, is not an earthly city with a fixed geographical location, but it is a community that is given to men directly from above. It "comes down out of heaven." At no point does Fox strike out more boldly against the rubrics of conventional church history than in his doctrine of the mother church.

The true church is the church that is true to Christ in the same way that a bride or spouse is true to her husband. Marriage in the Christian sense is a genuine oneness between two people. The husband-wife relationship between God's son and God's people is the mark of the true church. Fox says that the true members of Christ's church "are called a spouse by which they have all one mind, soul and heart and spirit, married to Christ Jesus through which life and virtue and holiness and goodness are brought forth being married to him who is righteousness and truth itself."[31]

It was a generally accepted article of biblical orthodox faith in the seventeenth century that the church was the bride of Christ, and most of the denominations made this claim. But Fox insisted that this claim is invalid unless there is an actual we-thou conversational relationship between Christ and his people. To the Church of Rome, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists Fox says: " . . . all you that call yourselves churches . . . you say you never heard Christ's voice. How then are you married to Christ that never heard his voice and Christ thy husband never spoke to thee? Strange kind of marriage!"[32] It is the conversational relationship with Christ that makes the church the church.

If the true church is the obedient spouse of Christ, the false church bears the name that describes the unnatural relationship—whore. The "whore, or false church, went from the true mother, heavenly Jerusalem, and from Christ the true husband," says Fox. In the book of Revelation the false institutional church which is so confident of its perpetuity and security "sits as a queen, seeing no sorrow," and the true church is forced to flee to peripheral lands. For all her queenly majesty the institutional church is a usurper. She rules in place of the rightful

ruler who has fled to the wilderness. A conspicuous part of the early Quaker's message is the proclamation that the true church is now coming out of the wilderness. "In this day of the Lord's power," says Fox, there is to be a restoration of the true church and this church is now "coming out of the wilderness leaning on her beloved."[33] The people of God is again being brought to the life of dialogue that the apostles were in "and thousands and ten thousands witness it."

Early Quakers believed that preaching the gospel must inevitably produce a community whose life is sustained by a continuous dialogue with him whom God has made the heavenly head and prophet of his people. Fox says that "God hath spoken to us, to wit, his church by his Son" and although the whole of organized Christianity have gone from this speaker yet now Christ's true church "is come and coming out of the wilderness, which is the bride, the wife of Christ. . . . And so Christ is the speaker again unto his church."[34]

A POSITIVE VISION

The new Israel that Christ came to establish has its foundations in a living conversational relationship between the risen Christ and his people. It is this relationship that God has all along been seeking in all his dealings with men. Fox says now God has spoken to us by his Son who is the head of his church, whom God speaks by; and all are to hear him and follow him. The church is, therefore, to be understood as a community of disciples, and discipleship means hearing and obeying. "None are Christ's disciples but who hear his voice and learneth of him and followeth him." It is the master-disciple relationship that is the true essence of the church's life and this involves not only hearing the master but obeying him. This vision of the disciple church inspired the Quakers to build a church community which was a radical departure from conceptions of church order in both the state church and free church traditions.

It should be plain by now why the early Quakers could not become concerned about questions of creeds, liturgies, sacraments, ordination and succession and many more things that have become associated with "the Christian religion" and over which Christians are continually disputing. Early Quakerism

differs from most historic Christian groups on the question of creeds, sacraments, ministry, authority of Scripture, etc., but it is not in a *sectarian* spirit that these differences first arose. They are the consequence of a new and radically different over-all conception of the church. It is not consistent with the Quaker ethos to debate these differences in a sectarian spirit as if they are merely the distinguishing marks of our "sect." The true ground of the many points in which Quakers differ from other Christians lies in the implications of the positive and comprehensive conception of the disciple church.

It is always a mistake to attempt to define Quakerism in terms of the ways in which Quaker practice differs from that of the generality of Christians. Quakerism then appears to be an accumulation of negatives: *no* water baptism, *no* bread and wine, *no* ordained ministers, *no* liturgy, *no* laity, etc. It often happens today that Quakers themselves understand their faith in terms of these negatives and think of the Quakers as a special kind of Christian who for some reason do not *need* the practices that all other Christians seem to need. When modern Quakers say they do not need these practices they usually mean that they are temperamentally independent of them and this carries the corollary that other people may be temperamentally dependent on them. When early Friends said they did not need these practices it was not because they had different temperaments from other Christians but because they had a different vision of the nature of the church.

It is not that the Quakers are the "no-sayers" and the institutional churches are the "yes-sayers." The institutional churches also say "no" and it was because they said "no" to the question, "Are you in the same life and power the prophets and apostles were in?" that Fox began to seek for the church that says "yes" in word and deed to this question. There is a choosing and a rejecting on both sides, and the question of which side has made the more drastic rejection will receive different answers depending on which side of the fence the answers come from.

A NEW CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIAN RENEWAL

The Reformers broke with the authority of Rome and the authority of tradition, replacing these by the authority of the

Bible. Reformation Christianity looks to the Bible for its vision of the restored church.

When early Friends sought to restore the church through a direct conversational relationship with the risen Christ they were departing from the well-beaten path of Reformation Christianity and opening up a different path of Christian renewal. There is no question that from the viewpoint of traditional Protestant orthodoxy Fox's doctrine of the scriptures is heterodox, but unlike most heretics his heterodoxy does not consist in the introduction of elements *alien* to the Hebrew-Christian tradition. His controversy with orthodox Protestant theology is entirely due to the *added* emphasis that he places upon the prophetic character of the Christian experience and church fellowship. Fox's Christianity is, in a very real sense, biblical Christianity, but he approaches the Bible in a fresh, living, and non-traditional way. His message contains a comprehensive view of Christianity in which the New and Old Testaments do not occupy the position of central authority. Supreme authority is attributed only to him to whom the Scriptures themselves ascribe such authority. Thus the Quaker conception of renewal does not stand on the authority of the book but on a living relationship with him to whom the book bears witness. Renewal is not to be found in the pages of a book but at the feet of the master.

It is only when we understand the Quaker movement in terms of a vision of universal Christian renewal that we can see its vision of the church in true perspective. Protestant church historians tend to ignore the larger vision of Quakerism and to define it in terms of those particulars where Quaker practice varies most conspicuously from the Protestant norm. Sometimes Quakers themselves try to describe their faith in terms of a negation of certain Protestant principles and practices. This is a mistake and breeds a sect-mindedness in us which is alien to the true spirit of Quakerism.

Today the Quakers, who three centuries ago rediscovered the true principle of Christian renewal, are themselves in need of renewal. They will never renew their life as long as they think of themselves as a sect, or a denomination, or a "religious society." The call is to be the people of God. Renewal comes only through answering that call.

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Comments

HENRY J. CADBURY

Anyone acquainted with Lewis Benson's thought and writing could have anticipated the characteristics of the present study of "The Early Quaker Vision of the Church." Relying on his unrivalled knowledge of the writings of George Fox, he has drawn into compact, vigorous, logical unity the recurrent emphases of the Quaker founder, indicating at times how these seem to have been misunderstood or neglected by some trends in modern Quakerism.

It would take more than the time available for me even to scan the early Quaker sources for detailed confirmation or correction of his argument or to compare his conclusions with other modern writings on the subject, including his own, by reading hundreds of frames of microfilm in two recent Ph.D. theses on this exact topic, by Emerson W. Shideler (Chicago University, 1948) and Arthur O. Roberts (Boston University, 1955), or listening to Maurice Creasey's tape-recorded series of lectures on "Friends and the Church." It is not necessary to do that since I shall here attempt merely to deal with certain assumptions of the essay.

First is the assumption that behind Fox's own thinking is an impeccable coherence. One is familiar with that assumption in other fields of religious study. It underlay the older and newer biblical theology. By skilful patching, the casual phrases of Paul in a variety of situations have been systematized into a Pauline theology. Indeed, from the handful of quite various early Christian thinkers has been worked out an impressive New Testament vision of the church.

The handful of early Quaker writers on the church are perhaps slightly more in mutual accord than their opposite numbers in the New Testament. Certainly Fox as known to Lewis Benson is more voluminous and more repetitious than Paul.

But I have the feeling that in both cases the discovered coherence is superimposed by the modern student. Hardly any relevant or irrelevant passage in the whole Bible is not somehow employed by Fox. He too was making fabric out of the *disjecta membra* of a most various literature. Fox ought really to be printed with biblical echoes in special type so that his style of chain quotation might be recognized by every reader. The paper here reviewed is scrupulously careful mostly to keep to the actual words of Fox. The resulting impression of logical unity in the original sources may be partly illusory. Spontaneous psychological unity is not always logical or theological unity. It has recently been observed of a quite different movement that a religion in its formative stage does not have a rounded doctrine. The observation could be true of early Quakerism.

A second assumption is that those aspects of the early Quaker vision thus reconstructed ought to be permanently normative to Quakerism. What purports to be a purely objective historical analysis turns into an almost prescriptive program. Deviationists are by implication castigated as being untrue to Quakerism, to pure Christianity, to "the disciple church" or whatever name is adopted for the author's ideal. There is no room left for legitimate development, which seems strange since Quakerism itself was a protest against congealed tradition.

In fact, whether unconsciously or not, Friends were not so rigid. Nor were all the persistently ambivalent problems settled for them so definitely. The concept "church" took on different aspects. Even Fox was averse to only one use of the word—for the detested steeple-house building. Robert Barclay knows both the local and the catholic use of the term. He says in his *Apology:*

> It is the life of Christianity taking place in the heart that makes a Christian; and so it is a number of such being alive, joined together in the life of Christianity, that make a Church of Christ, and it is all those that are thus alive and quickened, considered together that make the catholic Church of Christ.

Barclay is not so certain that the church is solely due to God's initiative. As in most Christian solutions there is both a human and a divine element. In an adjacent paragraph Barclay speaks of "a particular church of Christ as a certain number of

persons gathered by God's spirit . . . who gather, meet and assemble together to wait upon God." They are gathered, and they gather, and in the latter they are voluntaristic. Similarly, William Penn speaks of the church as "a company of people agreed together in the sincere profession and obedience of the gospel of Christ." That God's action is prior to man's reception of truth does not disguise the dual aspect of the church.

Thus the question is raised whether it is true as the paper contends that the collective life of the church is primary and the individual renewal is secondary. Probably the early Friends developed both *pari passu* since they are mutually dependent facets of their experience. Both are included in Fox's early quest. Seeking was for individual satisfaction but it was also for the true church. In the seventeenth century more than since, and perhaps especially in the circle of Seekers from which Friends came, the problem of the true church was an urgent one. What the Seekers found in Quakerism was not a satisfactory theory of the church, but a satisfying experience of fellowship with God and man. This is one of the facts of historical color that could well have been emphasized, but it does not justify one in emphasizing church order as more primary. To ask whether the group is derived from the individuals or vice versa is as futile as the familiar question of the priority of the chicken or the egg.

I think Barclay and Penn, if not Fox, knew also the classic problem posed in the terms visible and invisible for the church.

Probably even Fox himself changed his focus or his practical emphasis if not his theory about the church. Of course we are not to expect that Fox admitted or even recognized the newer emphasis or differentiated it in date or source from his initial openings. From the Nayler episode on, internal and external situations tended to show the need for human controls. The phrase "gospel order" is particularly applied to the establishment of women's monthly and quarterly meetings. As Fox admitted, these may have no adequate scripture precedent but are yet a valid procedure. About the same time (1676) he with other Friends began to be involved in the constant but very mundane-looking effort to restrict the damage from avoidable government persecution. This does not constitute in the abstract a

contrast of church and state as institutions, but in effect Friends were fully aware of the predicament of mere group survival.

Nothing I have said is meant to deny that the essay under review has many true observations of early Quakerism's views, especially Fox's, not only of the church but also of other matters. As usual, there is little clarification of Christology. The phrases are borrowed from the Bible, imprecise and interchangeable. It is right to play down Quakerism's claim to represent primitive Christianity revived. It claims rather to go back before Adam for its precedent, "before sects was." Fox disliked the word sect as much as he disliked "Quaker." So did Rufus Jones when he wrote his lecture (1945), "Original Quakerism a *Movement* not a *Sect*." So does Lewis Benson, but in each case for a different reason. As the word is used today by church historians Quakerism has proved for all that to be a sect. Of course Fox did not intend to found a church or a sect, nor did Luther or Wesley or Alexander Campbell; but they "did what they didn't intend." Words change their meaning and even when we repeat faithfully the early Friends' phrases the context of today gives a different connotation.

On the rare occasions when Lewis Benson uses quite modern jargon it does not seem to be very happy. I refer to the recurrent "dialog(ic)" and "conversation(al)." As terms they are alien to Fox. They suggest for the man-God relationship more reciprocity than do Fox and most of the Bible. Actually God does most of the speaking and man is to hear (i.e., obey). Here again Fox has a baffling variety of metaphors other than dialogue for the relationship.

My response to Lewis Benson's stimulating essay is not to construct out of selected early Quaker quotations a rival well-knit alternative doctrine of the church, nor is it to emphasize those elements in our classic inheritance that appeal to me as true or as contrary to developments that I may dislike in contemporary Quaker thought. Resisting on this occasion such temptations, I have seen fit to point out two assumptions that seem to me to underlie his presentation of a doctrine of the church in spite of the authentic character of many of its specific ideas.

T. CANBY JONES

Lewis Benson's cogent presentation of the early Quaker vision of the church deserves our serious consideration. The clarity and absoluteness of the vision confront us with a stimulating challenge. This study is an essentially true and accurate account of the concept of the church held by George Fox and the early Friends, hence those earnestly seeking the Quaker contribution to the restoration of Christ's church must begin with it.

Lewis Benson correctly pictures Fox as envisioning a church which is not a splinter sect but is the people of God, a visibly gathered fellowship which lives in the same power and spirit in which the first Apostles lived. From this standpoint the living and true church consists only of those who hear and obey Christ, who know the power of his cross, who live in righteousness and holiness, free from the secular and cultural forces of society. The true ordering of this church comes through the direct rule of our Lord himself, who suffuses all with a sense of universal Christian renewal.

The first critical question I raise concerns Lewis Benson's use of the term *sect*. He defines a sect as a group which withdraws from a larger parent body for doctrinal or practical reasons. Is this negative definition sufficient? Does not every sect also exhibit positive qualities such as ethical purity, standards of belief, or particular testimonies neglected by the church-at-large?

Does the stimulating absoluteness of Fox's vision of the church mean we must reject the World Council of Churches and its federalism as false and apostate? There is little doubt that George Fox would have rejected the World Council, but is this what God's "Heavenly Prophet" is saying we must do today? Does not the love which the World Council of Churches demonstrates toward its member sects open a new vista of universal Christian renewal?

Remarkably, the World Council of Churches' attitude toward Quakerism and other groups brings out the positive aspects of sects. Rather than considering them undesirable splinters and parasites, leaders of the World Council carefully cherish the unique and distinctive testimonies of the so-called sects, believing that such groups serve the church-at-large as a living con-

science, constantly reminding it of truths it must not forget. Several of these leaders have freely admitted to me that the World Council of Churches not only needs but cannot survive without the Quakers.

A primary question arises here: How do we overcome our sectarianism and recover the vision of universal Christian renewal? When we ask this question, we ask it not only for ourselves but for every Christian body. The vision of renewal and the principles involved in it must speak to all of Christ's flock. He calls us to join hands and go forward together. Savoring our differences, we come to know oneness in him.

The second major question is closely related to that of sectarianism. What can we legitimately absolutize out of the seventeenth century Quaker vision of the church? Early Friends were absolutists, crusaders convinced of victory, convinced of the rightness of their cause and of the wrongness of those who opposed it. In the *kairos* of the seventeenth century, Quakers successfully waged "The Lamb's War" against evil on all fronts. For Fox, "The Lamb's War" was an immediate and relevant response to the Lord's call in Commonwealth and Cavalier England. Likewise, we must respond to his present-day challenge. The living amalgam of the renascent church flowed out into new forms in the seventeenth century. If we are led by the living Christ who rules immediately in his church, we must not absolutize early Quaker forms but must find Christ in the new forms and amalgams of twentieth-century earth.

But a distinction needs to be drawn between cultural form and eternal form, between traditionalism and living tradition. It may be that the characteristics of the church as outlined by Lewis Benson can be divorced from formalism and traditionalism and be, instead, conceived of as eternal forms or principles. Eternal principles do not suffer by being called absolute. They are so by nature.

As Lewis Benson has indicated, early Friends saw the true church as the people of God, gathered by the Spirit to live in the same life and power as the Apostles. In freedom and obedience, in righteousness and holiness, the people of God look for the final victory of the great Prophet who has come to teach his

people himself. Such a view of the church can and should appeal to all Christians and all men. But the setting for this obedient church is the whole sweep of church history with its hundreds of periods of fulfillment and of renewal. In Acts we are promised an everlasting inheritance with the saints in light. This includes persons like Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Anselm, St. Seraphim and St. Tykhon of Zadonsk as well as the Quaker saints.

The principles which characterize the true and obedient church must be applied to all churches and all men. But this must be done by means of trusting discussion, by love and understanding and not by accusations of apostasy. The vision of the obedient church is a right way for all in a spiritual sense, in whatever way each church may understand its principles to apply. Our task is to be Christ's instruments in the restoration of his church in its whole spectrum. Failure is certain if we see only the red or the blue.

The first principle of the obedient church is its primary allegiance to Jesus as its Christ and living Lord. At this point I disagree with Lewis Benson on the primary emphasis of Fox's message. He states that Fox's initial quest and early openings concerned the covenant community and the nature of the church. I believe that Fox was concerned primarily with allegiance to Christ and his government in all things. For Fox the gathering of a covenant community is secondary, in a theological sense, to the Lord who does the gathering and makes the covenant. Like the Bible, the Church is an indispensable witness to a fruit of the living Word, but it is not that Word. The church is a fellowship of the redeemed which appears wherever the Redeemer makes himself known, but the focus is ever on the Redeemer.

Whatever vision of the church we may have, it is conditioned by our age and environment and is subject to judgment and destruction by the Lord himself if we make absolute a partial truth. The living Lord remains faithful to restore his covenant community in each generation among those who are obedient to his heavenly vision. Our primary allegiance belongs to him, and to us he shall make known through his spirit what form his church must take and in what ways it must obey him.

Our allegiance as church members is to our particular church heritage as he leads us into living dialogue with all Christians. To us all he will reveal his will for his whole church.

D. ELTON TRUEBLOOD

Lewis Benson has been known to me for twenty-seven years. During that considerable time I have admired the way in which, as his ideas about the Quaker message have developed, he has demonstrated intellectual and moral courage. He has followed what seems to him the logic of a position, even when it has gone against current trends, and he has done so without flinching. Consequently, he has forced thoughtful Friends to reconsider positions formerly accepted uncritically. The present paper is one more contribution to this beneficent vocation to which Lewis Benson has devoted so much of his mature career. Even those who believe that Lewis Benson has made wrong conclusions are forced to admit his thoroughness in studying the material at hand, particularly that produced by the prolific mind of George Fox. The present essay gives evidence of careful reading and equally careful documentation. Our author has done his home work.

The special value of the present essay is that it forces the thoughtful reader to realize that Fox had a doctrine of the church and that this doctrine is intrinsic to our founder's conception of the gospel. Fox was trying to do a very big thing and this big thing had to do with the Church of Jesus Christ. On this point Lewis Benson is very convincing—so convincing, indeed, that this position should henceforth be our Quaker starting point in further debate.

We may agree, in the second place, that what Fox was seeking to introduce or reintroduce was no merely negative conception. Quakers are caricatured if they are designated in terms of the sacraments, the liturgy and the clerical orders which they *reject*. The great positive idea was that of universal Christian renewal. The vision of Fox on Pendle Hill we do not understand with complete certainty, but we know that it was an *exalted* vision. We know that it included the idea that the Lordship of Christ is something that can be known in the present

tense. As Fox said later, "Christ *is* come to teach His people Himself."

As one who agrees with Lewis Benson up to this point, I am also forced, in honesty, to say wherein I think he is mistaken. I believe he makes wrong conclusions in two major ways, first, by taking the words of Fox uncritically, and, second, by an over-emphasis upon the significance of dialogue.

There is no indication that Lewis Benson recognizes the naivete of Fox. As a matter of fact, Fox was, in many areas, the prisoner of his own rhetoric. He seemed to think that a proposition was true simply because he had uttered it. Part of this was because of his lack of education and part of it was because of a lack of the sense of humor which would have given perspective to his own pretensions. He needed very badly Cromwell's famous reminder of the possibility of being mistaken.

It is clearly true that Fox *claimed* not to be starting a sect, but this does not mean that he was correct in this finite judgment. As a matter of fact he *did* start a sect. It is not sufficient for Lewis Benson to say it was not a sect simply because it did not split off from some other constituted body such as the Church of England or the Church of Rome. To say that a sect cannot come into existence except by a divisive process is to be pedantic. By common consent of thoughtful people the existence of a sect is determined, not by what a movement comes *from*, but by what it develops *into*. The end product is the test, and there is no doubt that Quakerism became vividly sectarian. The most obvious characteristics of a sect emerged in the eighteenth century, but many of the marks emerged earlier. A movement is a sect when it is a body certain of its own righteousness and convinced that it has a monopoly on truth. The separatism is a result rather than a primary cause of sectarianism; it arises from the over-simplification which distinguishes too sharply between the inside "right" view and the surrounding apostasy.

Fox was a very great man, but he did not understand adequately the finite predicament in which he and his fellow Quakers stood. He ran the risk of idolatry in a too-facile identification of the human "church" which he established with the life which the prophets and the apostles were in. The other side of this confusion was the failure to recognize the depth of Christian

experience and understanding on the part of contemporary Christians who were not of his fold. The reader who immerses himself in Fox and little else will hardly realize that Fox lived in one of the really great periods of Christian vitality and witness. One does not need to know much to know that Fox is unfair, for example, in his patronizing references to Baptists. After all, the life of Fox overlapped with the lives of Milton, Bunyan, Baxter, Jeremy Taylor and many other Christian giants, to speak only of his own countrymen.

If Fox had been a little less naive he would have realized that there was no necessary identity between the system he set up and the true gospel order. Christ is, indeed, the Head of the Church, but it is living men who decide what the headship of Christ involves. As a matter of history some of the "order" which Fox set up was soon outmoded. It may be true, as Lewis Benson quotes Fox as saying, that "when people are returned to Christ their shepherd they know his voice and follow Him," but it is also true that some men *think* they have returned to Christ their shepherd when others do not think so. What do we do then? Every understanding of Christ's leadership is mediated necessarily by the judgment of men. Fox failed to recognize the egocentric predicament as applied to himself, though he saw it as applied to others.

Part of the strength of Fox came from the fact that he was naive, but that is no reason why we should take him seriously at every point. If Quakerism ever becomes a movement in which the test of rightness is what Fox said or did, we are already Pharisees and the reality is gone. Quakerism need not hark back always to the seventeenth century, because development is one of the marks of vitality. It is not clear that Lewis Benson knows this.

The second major mistake of the present paper is the extreme emphasis on real Christianity as dialogue or conversation. One or the other of these words appears constantly, so that the conception is run into the ground. Now the idea of divine-human dialogue is a valid idea. We speak to God in prayer because God has spoken to us in revelation and our right response is obedience. But to make this the whole of Christianity is to be guilty of gross over-simplification. Often the obedience is not

clear because the message is not simple or clear. There are many topics on which equally good men differ, even though those on both sides are men of prayer. Prayerful Roman Catholics obey their message which forbids birth control while prayerful Protestants, including Quakers, obey their message, which urges birth control. We cannot suppose that the divine message differs: we are bound to suppose instead that somebody has not heard correctly. In short, the existence of a claimed dialogue does not solve the practical problem, for there are different dialogues reported.

Christianity involves the "we-thou" relationship, but it also involves much more. For example it involves love of the brethren, a subject on which the paper under examination is essentially silent. Christ's own major test of the true church was that of love and nothing else. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). If we say that the test is that of whether men "hear God," as Lewis Benson, quoting Fox, suggests, our difficulty is the epistemological barrier. We have no way in the world of knowing whether there is a matching between what God says and what men hear. I can match what I hear with what you say you hear, but that is another matter. We must, of course, try our best to hear God speak, but we have no possible way of verifying the accuracy of our hearing. With Christ's test, however, we are on different ground, for love is something which can be observed by others in its fruits of tenderness and concern.

In the long run we shall probably agree that Quakerism has made a significant contribution to the idea of the church, especially in its insistence on the universal ministry, but the difference between the Quaker church and the other Christian bodies is not as great as Lewis Benson supposes. I am sure that God is urging us to build the true church, but this is what we do not yet have. I do not know how big Christ's true church is, but I am sure that it is bigger than ours.

Response to Comments

LEWIS BENSON

As author of the main article, I have the privilege and duty of replying to the criticisms brought to it in the three preceding statements. In this necessarily brief response it will be possible to deal with only a few points that seem to me to be of greatest importance. Limited space does not permit a point-by-point review of all the comments. It has been encouraging to me that all three comments make no attempt to disprove that Fox held the vision which I have ascribed to him, but *Henry Cadbury* points out that there is a temptation for the modern interpreter to impose a coherence on Fox's thought that does not belong to it. He further states that it is his "'feeling" that the coherence I have found in Fox is just another "case" of a coherence that is "superimposed by the modern student."

From the beginning of my study of Fox about thirty years ago I have been aware of the problem that Henry Cadbury raises. I read most of the works of Fox *before* I began to read his modern interpreters. When I began to study the modern attempts to bring coherence to Fox's thought I was struck by the disparity between Fox's writings and the principle of unity that was being imposed upon them. I discovered that the kind of coherence being imposed on Fox was the same kind of coherence that is found in the writings of Eckhart and the Cambridge Platonists; that modern studies of Fox's thought penetrate only as far as it appears to follow the pattern of Christian Platonism. To Henry Cadbury's observation that there is scarcely a subject in the Bible not mentioned by Fox, I would therefore reply that Fox's comprehensive interpretation of the Christian faith is now largely inaccessible to the modern Quaker mind just because most of it does not come within the range of this modern theory of interpretation.

In my study of Fox's thought I have always sought the principle of unity and coherence that *belongs* to the subject matter

I have not begun with a pattern and then selected and rejected material on the basis of conformity to that pattern. I claim that Fox's thought *has* coherence and unity, albeit it is not the unity and coherence of the Greek-philosophical tradition but the unity and coherence of the Hebrew-prophetic tradition. I claim that the principle of unity which I have re-discovered brings into focus the *whole* of Fox's thought. This claim ought to be examined critically. But it is not very weighty criticism merely to observe that the suggested understanding "may be " partly illusory, or to express a "feeling" that this is just another case of a coherence superimposed by the modern student.

Henry Cadbury reads into my essay a demand that the early Quaker vision should be "permanently normative to Quakerism," and says that I have left no room for "legitimate development." I have never claimed that early Quaker thought and practice must be normative for all generations of Quakers. The early Quaker vision of the church is not static. In this world of change it leaves room for new ways to conform to him in whom there is no variableness. But not every new development is a legitimate development. As a result of my studies I have been led to the conclusion that twentieth-century Quakerism, in its chief distinctive features, is not a legitimate development of the early Quaker vision. This is not because it is different. We should expect it to be different. It is because it has shifted its center of gravity from the Hebrew-prophetic stream of religion to the Greek-philosophical stream. I am not pleading to turn back the clock. We cannot repossess the glories of primitive Friends by imitating them. But we must bring our center of gravity back into the Hebrew-prophetic stream of religion.

My critics have incorrectly assumed that because I argued that the church is not secondary I am maintaining that it is primary. Henry Cadbury expresses my own position when he says of early Friends that among them individual Christian renewal and the collective life of the church were mutually dependent, and developed *pari passu*. My point is that the church is not supplied apart from the gospel but that it is an essential part of the gospel.

Elton Trueblood's chief criticism lies in his contention that Fox's teaching about the corporate obedience of the church is

made invalid by what he calls "the epistemological barrier." He feels that Fox's vision of an obedient people answering unitedly Christ's call to righteousness is unrealizable because the call to righteousness is heard differently by each hearer. He claims that Fox was unaware of this problem and naively took it for granted that all men see truth in the same terms. Fox never envisioned a fellowship upon which unity falls like dew from heaven and where no effort is needed to obtain it. He was no stranger to such as claim divine guidance whether or no it leads to righteousness and the cross. He was much occupied in his later years combating the influence of those who pleaded for an individualistic conception of guidance and would not join in the quest for the right way for all. Finding the corporate witness through corporate obedience has always presented difficulties. But since World War I, Friends have been questioning the *possibility* of finding a united witness on moral issues. Neave Brayshaw, one of the last to take a firm stand on this question, wrote in 1915, "It is a mistake as to *actual fact* to suppose that at any part of its history our Society stood for the bare principle of the Light without showing forth its testimony to the teaching of the Light." The power that breaks the epistemological barrier is the power of Christ.

Our peace testimony has become what Fox would call a "talking but not walking" testimony. It has become a peace *creed,* a theological construction not related to the "walking" of the whole membership. As a church fellowship we do not walk in the light and our reason for not walking is remarkable: we have discovered after almost three centuries of walking in the light in "unity and sameness of mind" that such a thing is impossible! However much we may feel constrained to deny the existence of a corporate testimony we are confronted with the fact. As Neave Brayshaw put it: "To deny that Friends *essentially as Friends,* have borne a testimony against war, and suffered for it, is like denying that England was concerned in the burning of Joan of Arc . . ."

Elton Trueblood asserts that love is the only mark of the disciple fellowship. He reasons that we can all love together but we cannot all obey together because we all understand obedience in a different way. So here are two conceptions of the church: in

one, hearing and obeying is a unifying experience; in the other it is a dividing experience. One has a vision of the church united in love *and* obedience and the other sees the church united in love but not in obedience. Certainly, love of the brethren is a mark of the disciple church. There is no lack of emphasis on this in Fox's teaching. But Fox would deny, and I do also, that this is the only mark of the disciple church. The children of the light are those who *walk* in the light and Fox was surely right in understanding "walking" to mean obedience to the moral imperative that comes from the head of the church.

Fox's vision of "a willing people" serving God in righteousness and holiness has grown dim and grows steadily dimmer. We are losing the character of an admonishing fellowship. The queries which once asked whether Friends were being faithful to the moral truth committed to them are being transformed into a pietistic device for private personal self-examination. We are forgetting that "testimony" means testimony to the power of Christ to unite us in righteousness.

Love of the brethren for one another leads people to Christ, but unity in obedience also leads people to Christ. The watchword of Friends has ever been "love and unity" and not "love instead of unity." Fox says of this "perfect love and perfect oneness" that "this oneness is that which convinces the world, that the world may know that God hath sent his son, by the love and unity and oneness that is amongst the saints, the church . . ."

If it is naive to believe that Christ can lead all into the same moral truth and sustain all in witnessing to it then perhaps what we need is more of this kind of naivete.

Canby Jones' interest centers around the problem of sectarianism. He takes it for granted that Quakers are related to this problem in the same manner as other denominations and he sees nothing in Quakerism itself that throws light on this problem.

All three critics assume that Quakerism is a sect and its message a sectarian message. Canby Jones is more explicit than the others in his belief that we can only get rid of our sectarianism by means of a force outside Quakerism. My own view is that the Quakerism of Fox is not sectarian; that modern Quakerism has

come under the influence of an alien sectarian spirit which can be banished by means of resources within the Quaker ethos.

It should be noted that none of the comments recognizes that the term sect is a term whose meaning varies with the standpoint of the user. Elton Trueblood maintains that there is one definition of a sect that is accepted "by common consent of all thoughtful people" and Henry Cadbury assumes that the word has only one meaning, "as used today by church historians." I think all three commentators may be using the term, perhaps unconsciously, in a way that is consistent with its most common usage in the larger Protestant theological seminaries. I do not feel compelled to follow them in this. The Quaker conception of the church cannot be framed in terms furnished by Protestant church historians any more than Protestant conceptions of the church can be accommodated to a Roman Catholic frame of reference. It is a basic assumption of my essay that conventional non-Quaker church history does not furnish the categories with which to discuss the Quaker vision of the church. Quakerism is not Protestantism nor is it a part of Protestantism. The Quaker vision of the church contains its own conception of the nature of a sect.

Canby Jones sees the World Council of Churches as the channel through which the same heavenly prophet who raised up the early Quaker movement is now mediating universal Christian renewal to the world. I do not share this view. He pictures the future Society of Friends as a "member sect" of the World Council, offering itself as a kind of permanent exhibit of those Christian truths that the "church-at-large" (whatever that is) does not wish to forget but has no intention of practicing. This picture does not appeal to me.

As I look into the future I see the disciple church struggling to maintain its life in conditions similar to those of the first century. I believe it will be more like a church of the cross in a Christ-denying world than like "the great church of the future" of which the ecumenicists are dreaming.

Books

Between God and History, by Richard K. Ullmann. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1959. 212 pages. 21 s.

Friends have yet to realize the close relationship between Quakerism and Christian existentialism. Richard Ullmann's new book, as well as his former *Friends and Truth* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1955), provides us with ample evidence for the many similarities between the two. Richard Ullmann is a British Friend with a German background who passed through the concentration camp experience during World War II. It is refreshing to read a Quaker writer who is familiar and conversant with the main currents of contemporary religious and philosophical thought, and who knows how to relate these insights to Quaker life and thought.

Between God and History deals with a variety of perplexing problems of Christian ethics from a Quaker point of view. Many of Richard Ullmann's basic religious assumptions and arguments have been current in Christian theology and ethics for the past twenty-five years, but he is one of the first to relate Quakerism to this new frame of reference. Among the significant points which he makes are the following: (1) No man can escape his existential involvement in history and the world. We cannot contract out of the world. Even the absolutist who tries to withdraw performs an act in history. Baron Von Huegel is quoted as decrying the "historic ingratitude of Friends" in their view of Christology and Scripture. Although Friends tend to over-spiritualize the great religious events of history, the figure of the Inward Christ significantly links religious experience and past event. Richard Ullmann suggests that an acceptable symbol of Friends' relationship to the world might be that of a candle giving forth light.

Second, just as no man can escape historical involvement, neither can he escape the ambiguities of moral choice. Quakers tend to idolize outward consistency. Yet the absolute and rela-

tive are present in every man, and every decision is made in a "complex nexus of demands" and in a tension between the claims of God and history. Every decision constitutes a risk which is taken with the full knowledge that the consequences of our action will have both good and bad effects. Even loyalty to Christ does not eliminate other loyalties and the ambiguities pertaining thereto. On the other hand, Friends are very careful not to espouse two moralities.

Third, even though one cannot escape history and the concrete decisions of life, man is not left to the mercy of fate and the relativities of time and place. Richard Ullmann refers to Friends as "peculiar universalists." Part of the evidence for this are the traditional Quaker testimonies. These are not general rules, universal truths or the Quaker equivalent of dogmas and creeds. Neither are they laws and principles of action, in spite of the prevailing Quaker notion that this is the case. Rather, they testify to the consistency of the Spirit as it reveals and gives meaning to the will of God in human experience. The Spirit is never to be identified with laws or principles of conduct. Richard Ullmann rejects a "Quaker legalism" based on blind adherence to abstract principles or "predetermined guidances," which is just as reprehensible as acting on the basis of expediency. Neither should twentieth-century Friends attempt to "carbon copy" the behavior patterns of seventeenth-century Friends. The important thing is to follow their example of faithfulness to their inner leadings and adherence to their God-given convictions. Responsible action means that we respond to God's will and Spirit in the concrete situations of life. The Spirit does not tell us what to do but develops an attitude and structure of selfhood which reflects the will of God.

Fourth, the aim of life is to become one's true self within the structure of being, which coincides with the will of God. One is called to *be* rather than *do* the will of God. Moreover, the aim of Quaker outreach work should not be to convert others to our point of view but to turn them to the fulfillment of their own true selfhood within the structure of God's being and will.

There are still other important ideas which are developed in *Between God and History,* such as the author's reference to the concept of "original grace," or what Friends more often call

"that of God in every man." This is a God-given capacity to discern sin and overcome it. It provides an important antidote for the heavy emphasis upon "original sin" in much of contemporary theology. Another important point is the affirmation that the Kingdom of God has an existential rather than temporal meaning. The tendency among Friends has been to shift the emphasis from "living in the Kingdom" to "working for the Kingdom." The important thing is to reflect in one's Christian action the Kingdom which has come into the human heart. It is in this way that one is able to bear tragedy and suffering while trying to change the human situation toward which one's action is directed.

These and the many other insights which Richard Ullman expresses in his book by no means constitute "notional religion." He fortifies his arguments with an abundance of personal experiences in which he has encountered profound tragedy and suffering, but at the same time has discovered the meaningful character of human existence without being overcome by despair. We may call him a "Quaker existentialist," which is not substantially different from the Quaker who declares that his religion is one of experience and that religion has an integral relationship to the whole of life. This book is very important reading for Friends who wish to relate their Quakerism in a meaningful way to the important insights of contemporary religious and philosophical thought, and particularly to the insights of Christian existentialism.

Wilmer A. Cooper

Periodicals

Readers of this Journal will be interested to know of other publications by Friends, rather similar in format if not in content to this magazine.

The Seeker, now in its second year, is a publication of the Seekers Association, founded in England by Howard Collier in 1946. The Association is made up of Friends and other like-minded people, aiming "to encourage the personal and corporate search for truth in a spirit of free and reverent inquiry, a spirit devotionally strong as well as intellectually honest." Each issue of the publication is 20 to 25 pages long, containing three to six articles. Among the authors of the 1959 issues are found the following names: Fred J. Tritton, Leslie Wain, Katherine M. Wilson, John Marsh Pitt, W. Conroy Jarvis, etc. The editor is Leonard Tomkinson. Individual issues can be obtained by sending 1/6 (25¢) for each to: John Yarwood, 2 Larchlands, Tylers Green, Penn, Bucks., England.

Concern is the title given another Friends Journal now in its second year, published by evangelical Friends. It contains brief and longer articles as well as announcements of coming events. Arthur O. Roberts is its editor. Copies can be obtained from Verl Lindley, 15233 E. Jenkins, Whittier, California.

Inward Light is a comparatively ancient publication, being now in its 23rd year of publication. Sponsored by the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology, it carries articles relating to psychology in its relationship to religion, and many other topics. It generally runs 40 to 50 pages in length, and is published twice a year. Subscriptions cost $1.50 annually. Requests for copies should go to the editor, Elined Kotschnig, 3518 Bradley Lane, Washington 15, D.C.

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Concern is the title given another religious pamphlet, this one edited by a group of Mennonites, with Lewis Benson as the one Quaker member on the Editorial Council. Publication started in 1954 and there have appeared one or two issues annually

since then, each issue carrying articles on a variety of subjects but all designed to "stimulate informal discussion and common searching among concerned Christians for a strengthening of prophetic faith and conduct." It is of interest also to note that the Mennonites, like the Friends, have started a Theological Study Group. Prices of the pamphlets vary from 50¢ to 90¢ each, depending on length. These can be obtained from Herbert Klassen, 727 Reba Place, Evanston, Illinois.

Contributors

Lewis Benson is a Philadelphia Friend known as the author of the pamphlet *Prophetic Quakerism* and an active member of the group of Friends who for over five years published the quarterly, *The Call, Journal of Spiritual Reformation.* By trade a printer, his true vocation is the study of early Quakerism and especially of George Fox, and the spread of the knowledge he obtains to the Society of Friends. In 1954-55 he was a Fellow at Woodbrooke and lectured at the same school in 1958. He also lectured in Pendle Hill last year. He is currently engaged part-time in his trade.

Henry J. Cadbury, known for more than a quarter of a century as chairman of the Friends Service Committee, and formerly Professor of New Testament in the Harvard Divinity School, is currently lecturer on Quakerism at Haverford College and a teacher at Pendle Hill. He was educated at Haverford College and Harvard University. He is a student of Quaker history (rather than theology, he states). His Quaker writings and speeches include George Fox's Annual Catalog, the *Book of Miracles,* and recent Swarthmore and William Penn lectures. The Pendle Hill pamphlet, *The Character of a Quaker,* is his most recent publication.

T. Canby Jones is Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy and Chairman of the Department at Wilmington College, from which position he is currently absent on leave. Born in Japan, he was reared on the Fisk University campus. During the war he was in Civilian Public Service and later spent 18 months as Associate Secretary of Friends Peace Service. He attended Westtown School and Haverford College and took his B.D. and Ph.D. degrees from Yale University, the latter in 1956. His thesis topic was, *George Fox's Teachings on Redemption and Salvation.*

D. Elton Trueblood is Professor of Philosophy in Earlham College. The most recent of his 18 published books is *Confronting Christ,* a book of meditations. Among the positions he formerly held were teaching positions at Guilford and Haverford Colleges, Harvard and Stanford Universities and Garrett Biblical Institute. He was at one time a Fellow at Woodbrooke, and was recently Chief of Religious Information in the U. S. Information Agency for two years. He was editor of *The Friend* from 1935 until 1946. He is chairman of the newly-expanded Department of Philosophy and Religion in Earlham College which will be offering graduate work for Quaker pastors and others.

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